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ABSTRACT

Leaders in the field of early care and education identified five main problems in the training of early care and education providers. These problems were: (1) a shortage of trainees: (2) limited access to training; (3) lack of agreement on the content of the training; (4) lack of consistent certification standards and models of professional development; and (5) a fragmented delivery system. Discussion focused on ways of creating greater cohesion in the delivery of training. Major obstacles to this cohesion are attitudinal, instructional, financial, regulatory, and definitional obstacles. Strategies for overcoming each problem were discussed. The report closes with recommendations for the roles that the professional community and foundations might play in solving early care education teacher training problems. (BB)

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A Quest for Coherence in the Training of Early Care and Education Teachers

Report of a Meeting at

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund

New York City

June 20, 1990

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INTRODUCTION

America today is experiencing an unprecedented need by working parents for more child care. This situation, combined with unequivocal research results attesting to the positive effects of early intervention for low-income children, has precipitated vigorous cross-sector interest in increasing the quantity of early care and education services. Recent federal legislative initiatives, including Head Start reauthorization, the Family Support Act, and the Act for Better Child Care, are likely to increase the funds available to launch such services. Already, state efforts, largely school-based programs, have made additional slots available to at-risk and low-income children. Simultaneously, entrepreneurs in the for-profit sector, capitalizing on current demand, are opening proprietary child care facilities in record numbers. In short, after decades of neglect, America is enlarging its supply of child care.

While welcome, this rapid expansion of services poses many new challenges for what has historically been a "limited-growth" industry. Increasingly, child care, Head Start, and public preschool and kindergarten programs are recognized as equally important delivery systems for early childhood education. By far the over-riding concern for this growing system of early care and education is the shortage of well-trained, high-quality personnel entering and remaining in the field. Characterized by low salaries and low status, the field currently experiences an annual 41 percent turnover rate among child

care providers. Forecasted expansion in demand for services will only exacerbate the current staffing crisis. The dilemma is particularly acute for two reasons. First, there is a consensus among professionals that the quality of early childhood programs is highly correlated with provider competence and limited rates of staff turnover. Second, there is little consensus among scholars or practitioners regarding the appropriate course of study and practice for training early care and education providers.

Under present conditions, early care and education teachers may be trained in a variety of in-service situations; in recognized credentialling programs, such as Head Start's Child Development Associate (CDA); in two-year professionally-oriented community college programs; in four-year liberal arts programs; and in graduate schools of education. Training may be targeted to teaching children of different ages. Some programs claim they train teachers to educate chidren from birth through through elementary school. Others specialize in training for teachers of infants and toddlers or of three to five-year-olds. In the absence of federally mandated training standards, states and municipalities vary widely in what they require regarding training for teachers of young children--whether in publicly funded child care, Head Start, private preschools, or the early grades of public schools. These differing programs, lacking commonly accepted standards, are rarely coordinated. The "staffing crisis," therefore, is not simply one of supply, but one of quality as well.

Given such conditions and recognizing the additional burdens that growth will place on the field, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund invited leaders in early care and education to attend a one-day meeting to discuss the possibilities for replacing the present piecemeal and redundant training experiences most teachers face with a coherent delivery system of linked educational courses spanning the preliminary in-service training for newcomers to the advanced graduate work of leaders in the field. Such a course of study would support the establishment of career ladders and the subsequent increase in compensation for more highly qualified staff. Conference participants were asked to consider three questions:

I. What are the barriers to, and strategies for, achieving a linked delivery system for training early care and education teachers/providers?

II. What strategies should be employed to assure greater responsiveness of such systems in light of the diverse educational, cultural, and linguistic needs of early care and education teachers/providers?

III. What role could the professional community play in solving the current problems of training? What role could foundations play?

In the following description of the meeting, the discussion of the participants is recorded. Since this report is intended to be an informal account, no academic references are included.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

In the course of discussion, five major problems that characterize the training of early childhood professionals emerged:

I. A shortage of trainees. The field of early care and education has experienced chronic personnel shortages--the result of low wages, low status, poor working conditions, and limited advancement opportunities. Historically, the field has been dominated by women. More recently, greater opportunities for women have siphoned off many potential early care and education providers to more lucrative fields, while low wages have kept men from entering the field in any significant numbers. Subsidized entry-level training opportunities--once prevalent and attractive incentives for low-income providers to enter the field--have diminished, and consequently the supply of recruits with any form of early childhood education background has decreased.

II. Limited access to training. An increase in the number of entrants to the field would not necessarily solve this shortage, given the current lack of accessible and appropriate training programs. While this is particularly problematic in rural America, access to training is often difficult even in urban centers. Candidates, many of whom lack their own transportation, often find that public transportation does not meet their needs. The problem of accessibility is compounded by the fact that institutions vary in the type of training they offer, often failing to match either the desires of candidates or the needs of the communities they serve.

Further, accessible and appropriate training is uneven because it is supported by some, but not all, employers.

III. Lack of agreement on the content of training. Once enrolled in training programs, candidates are likely to experience a confusing hodgepodge of approaches to curriculum content and pedagogy. Owing in part to different traditions, programs in child care and early education have offered course content rooted in the study of child and family development, while pedagogical approaches are based on curriculum for teaching young children. Disagreement exists about the appropriate balance between competency-based and theory-based instruction. Other debates center around how best to integrate multicultural/multilingual and parent education/involvement components into teacher training.

IV. Lack of consistent certification standards and models of professional development. Currently, professional entry positions, career advancement patterns, certification ranges, and professional development models are neither uniform nor clearly defined. Nearly every measurable characteristic of provider training will continue to vary until there is some consensus regarding acceptable ranges and criteria for entry into, and advancement within, the field. Such a highly idiosyncratic system can only result in the wasted time, effort, and resources of those seeking training and in the lowering of educational standards in children's programs.

V. Fragmented Delivery System. Haphazard and fragmented, provider training is rarely sequentially planned or cumulative across

child care, Head Start, and public school systems; across two-year, four-year, and graduate academic institutions; or to satisfy differing credentialling and regulating requirements. There is, for example, no recognized or systematic means to accumulate training credit. Pre-service training is rarely coordinated with in-service training, which itself is often insufficiently tailored to meet individual needs. Teacher training institutions, particularly those that award different terminal degrees, rarely sequence their instructional programs between institutions, forcing trainees to repeat courses as they move from one academic setting to the next.

BARRIERS TO A LINKED TRAINING DELIVERY SYSTEM

Having chronicled these major and interrelated problems associated with training in early childhood education, discussion then focussed on overcoming fragmentation in the delivery of training for individuals and institutions. Given the likelihood of increased training funds emanating from current and pending legislation, it is crucial at this time to formulate and put in place a coherent training system, one that is less disorganized and redundant for candidates and more efficient and cost-effective across institutions.

Several barriers impede the development of such a coherent training delivery system. While particularly germane to the problem of fragmented training, they pertain to all the problems outlined in the preceding section. Elimination of these barriers, it was felt, would not only help this fragmentation, but would ameliorate the problems of

supply, access, content, and quality as well. Five categories of barriers were identified: attitudinal, institutional, financial, regulatory, and definitional.

I. Attitudinal Barriers. Though often subtle, attitudinal barriers arising within and without the early care and education field are perhaps the greatest obstacle to achieving a coordinated approach to provider training. Historical ambivalence about the appropriateness of non-maternal care has made early care and education a controversial issue, which in turn has prevented consistent governmental and public support. As a result, establishing the legitimacy of non-maternal care became the primary issue for child care and early education advocates while the issue of how best to train personnel became secondary at best.

Even when sanctioned, non-maternal care did not, many felt, warrant special training. Often the ideal provider was envisioned as a mother-substitute. Child care and early education training was dismissed as something that would "come naturally," thereby delaying its acceptance as necessary for improving program quality.

Later, as the study of child development and early education gained legitimacy, two widely differing ideas about care and education evolved. Child care continued to be viewed as a "custodial" service for the children of the working poor while preschools were regarded as desirable "educational" programs for the children of the middle class. This legacy persists today, resulting in unequal salaries, status, and

standards for child care and preschool teachers, particularly those in public schools.

Until the stigma of non-maternal care is eradicated and until child care and early education are recognized as congruent, the chance for an integrated, cohesive training delivery system will be impeded.

II. Institutional Barriers. Because training is not coordinated among training institutions and because different programs have different requirements for graduates, course credits accumulated in one institution are not recognized in other settings. This inability to transfer credits acts to discourage advanced study and undermines sequential coursework. Further, it is not unusual for training strategies approved of in one training setting to be discouraged in others, or for there to be disagreement on the criteria for effective instruction. Consequently, training content and materials vary widely in both substance and tone. Moreover, they often fail to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Though recognized as problematic for decades, these institutional inconsistencies have been reinforced by three factors that must be alleviated if fragmentation is to be overcome: (1) fierce competition for students and funding among institutions; (2) disagreement about standards, both for the attainment of an early childhood degree and for credentials of the trainers; and (3) a perception of early care and education training as a finite activity, leading to employment in the

field rather than to advanced study at the baccalaureate or graduate levels.

III. Financial Barriers. Both individuals and training institutions face financial barriers to linking training. For individuals, there are two major financial disincentives. First, because there is no universal system for rewarding higher levels of training with enhanced compensation and professional status, there is little incentive for continued training. Second, because many providers of early care and education services are low-income, the costs of extensive training, proportionate to their salaries, are high.

For institutions, financial incentives to coordinate training programs are limited. In fact, considerable disincentives exist. By not recognizing credits for courses taken elsewhere, for example, institutions force entering candidates to repeat courses.

IV. Regulatory Barriers. Entry qualifications for those working with young children vary from no experience or training to a bachelor's degree. Fewer than half of all states have any pre-service requirements for early care and education employment or mandate ongoing in-service training after the caregiver is employed. Consequently, despite the agreed-upon value of training, many early childhood classrooms are staffed by persons with little or no experience with children or training in child development theory. Without more stringent regulation, the field will continue to employ untrained personnel with the result that children will not receive the services they deserve.

Unfortunately, the present unregulated status is supported by those who see this as a means to ease access to the field and to keep staffing costs low.

A beginning ground swell of advocacy is underway among professional groups, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, in favor of requiring pre-service training in child development theory and of constructing a professional development model. However, little consensus so far exists regarding specific remedies, and many states still resist the call for new regulations. Furthermore, it will be impossible to develop an integrated, high-quality training delivery system until increased training is rewarded with career advancement and increased compensation.

V. Definitional Barriers. Finally, the lack of a clear definition of the field and of the distinction between "training" and "education" poses additional dilemmas. Debate surrounds the question of whether early care and education is a true profession, complete with a specialized body of knowledge and agreed-upon standards.

"Training" and "education," moreover, are ambiguous terms. Generally, "training" is conceived of more narrowly than "education" and carries a somewhat less lofty connotation. Disagreement also exists about whether early care and education training is properly an academic or a vocational course of study and, if academic in nature,

when specialization should occur. Within training for early childhood educators, pre-professional and professional levels of training are separated and lack continuity. Such ambiguity reinforces differences in institutional perspectives, in pedagogy, in achieving an appropriate balance between theory and practice, and in decisions about the body of knowledge most relevant to the field.

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A LINKED TRAINING DELIVERY SYSTEM

Attention turned to formulating concrete strategies for overcoming these obstacles to a linked training delivery system. Preliminary strategies were suggested to address the attitudinal, institutional, financial, regulatory, and definitional obstacles outlined above. It was concluded that while foundations and the professional community may play different roles in addressing early care and education training issues, collaboration is a necessity for meaningful reform.

I. Overcoming Attitudinal Barriers

I.1 Goal: Increase public recognition of the importance of early care and education training and its impact on the quality of programs and the developmental experiences of young children.

Strategies: Conduct research that demonstrates concrete correlations between provider training, program quality, and child development and education. Engage in advocacy and public awareness campaigns to disseminate results.

I.2 Goal: Increase job satisfaction and enhance professional status of providers.

Strategies: Research and develop training models encouraging vertical and horizontal professional progression.

I.3 Goal: Increase policymaker and corporate awareness of early care and education training issues.

Strategies: Gather current data on the number and quality of training programs as well as on providers in training. Document the standard length of training experiences. Disseminate findings.

II. Overcoming Institutional Barriers

II.1 Goal: Improve communication and coordination between higher education and community-based (formal and informal) early care and education training programs.

Strategies: Develop innovative models and demonstration efforts that establish linkages between higher education and community-based programs. Evaluate efficacy and replicability of these efforts. Advocate for child care legislation to include mandates for institutional restructuring of training programs.

II.2 Goal: Establish a continuum of training between and consistent standards for two-year and four-year institutions offering early care and education training.

Strategies: Research and develop a continuum of training opportunities that are sequential and cumulative across colleges and universities offering training for early care and education practitioners. Develop a limited number of pilot sites. Evaluate efficacy and replicability.

II.3 Goal: Enhance linkages among training programs for infant, toddler, and preschool caregivers, and for family day care and center-based providers.

Strategies: Develop a position statement, with input from practitioners and scholars, representing a variety of disciplines, specifying common and different domains of training. Develop a training sequence based on the position statement. Implement select pilot efforts.

II.4 Goal: Promote greater access to training programs.

Strategies: Increase sensitivity to the special scheduling needs of early care and education students who are employed. Research and develop community-based "Gateway Programs" providing multiple points of access to training. Develop early care and education and literacy programs appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

II.5 Goal: Promote a training system more responsive to cultural diversity.

Strategies: Revise college curricula to reflect a greater emphasis on multicultural issues and the relationship between theory and practice. Provide release time for faculty to review and revise curricula and develop materials.

II.6 Goal: Promote innovative approaches to training.

Strategies: Chronicle available training resources, including those available on video and in other media. Evaluate their quality. Identify gaps in available training materials. Consider content and strategy to produce additional material in a variety of media.

III. Overcoming Financial Barriers

III.1 Goal: Promote an early care and education career ladder, correlating increased salaries and benefits with educational preparation and years of experience.

Strategy: Research and develop models.

III.2 Goal: Increase training scholarships to attract candidates to the early care and education field.

Strategies: Advocate for the revision of Pell Grant guidelines and the more efficient distribution of other federal funding. Provide additional scholarship monies and funding for advocacy.

III.3 Goals: Encourage legislation at the federal and state levels to include incentives for better articulation among institutions and programs providing formal and informal training opportunities.

Strategies: Make policymakers aware of the negative consequences of poor linkages and the cost-effectiveness of strong linkages. Support analyses that arm professionals with policy-relevant information.

III.4 Goal: Promote efficient distribution and use of federal funding for designing and implementing high quality training programs.

Strategies: Engage and fund advocacy and public awareness campaigns.

IV. Overcoming Regulatory Barriers

IV.1 Goal: Promote mandated pre-employment and in-service training requirements for early care and education staff as part of state child care regulations.

Strategies: Advocate for adoption of Child Development Associate credentialling and coordination of standards for Nursery/Kindergarten teacher certification in states where this does not exist. Consider adopting multiple levels of certification. Encourage communication between state certification and education departments, which are responsible for training providers, and human service agencies, which are responsible for licensing early care and education programs. Fund advocacy, pilot models, and public awareness campaigns.

IV.2. Goal: Insure specialization in child development/early childhood education by having it accepted as the course of study for early care and education providers within liberal arts institutions.

Strategies: Work with institutions of higher education and policy groups to gain acceptance of child development/early childhood education as an accepted liberal arts area of study, qualifying candidates for certification. Write an analysis paper detailing the implications of the above for institutions of higher education and for the early childhood field.

IV.3 Goal: Promote the development of cross-state reciprocal agreements for early childhood educators.

Strategies: Identify reciprocity agreements in other educational areas and assess their applicability for early childhood education. Support research to conduct assessment.

V. Overcoming Definitional Barriers

V.1 Goal: Achieve consensus on the requisite body of knowledge necessary to prepare individuals effectively to work with young children.

Strategies: Discuss requisite competencies that correspond to differing roles. Develop consensus around the body of knowledge necessary to promote competencies.

V.2 Goal: Assess the appropriate balance between formal training and life experience and between theory and practice in early childhood teacher preparation.

Strategies: Research alternative paths to teacher preparation and certification and assess whether particular paths are more effective for different roles and functions in the early care and education field. Support a thorough assessment of divergent training modalities and their comparative outcomes.

V.3 Goal: Establish guidelines for early care and education trainer qualifications.

Strategy: Discuss and create a position statement regarding the qualifications of those who teach teachers of young children.

V.4 Goal: Establish a prestigious fellowship in the early care and education field for the definition and study of critical research issues.

Strategies: Research and disseminate procedures for establishing the above. Fund ongoing fellowships in higher education.

SUMMARY

The group identified what it considered to be the five main problems which exist in the training of early care and education providers. Given the scope of the issues, discussion narrowed to focus on ways of creating more cohesion in the delivery of training. Five categories of major obstacles to such improvement were identified, and strategies for overcoming each barrier discussed. The recommendations below were made regarding potential roles for the professional and foundation communities.

The role the professional community might play in addressing issues in early care and education training falls into four broad categories; each requires greater discussion and collaboration between professional groups and organizations within the field than currently exists. Recommendations include:

1. Identify critical issues.
2. Conduct research and disseminate findings.
3. Develop position statements, standards, and models.
4. Engage in advocacy and public awareness efforts on early care and education issues.

Foundation support in these efforts is crucial. Partnerships with the early childhood education professional community may be forged by foundations in five broad areas:

1. Funding for research and development.
2. Funding for pilot models.
3. Scholarships for early care and education training.
4. Funding for special events promoting communication and discussion among practitioners, policymakers, and the public.
5. Funding for public awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts.

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